

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Montana Office of Public Instruction (OPI) implemented the Montana Striving Readers Project (MSRP) in 13 districts and 39 schools enrolling pre-kindergarten through grade 12 students. In year 1, a shortened year that ran from mid-February thru May 2012, the project involved at least 8,850 students and 900 staff members. The MSRP established school-based, On-site Leadership Teams to implement the Montana Literacy Plan, the state's comprehensive literacy plan for children birth through grade 12. On-site Leadership Teams are charged with overseeing the implementation of a data-based decision-making process to collect, analyze, and use high-quality data in a timely manner to assess the effectiveness of the school's literacy plan. Teams include certified teachers and principals and tend to meet multiple times a month. During meetings they engage in numerous activities, including conducting literacy needs assessments, developing a school literacy plan, developing action plans, and discussing schoolwide data.

State support to schools

Three state-level teams support the On-site Leadership Teams; this report focuses on two: the OPI Implementation Team (OPI Team) and the Instructional Consultant Implementation Team (Instructional Consultant Team). These two state-level teams provide professional development and technical assistance to all MSRP schools, both as a group and individually during school site visits. The OPI Team focuses its on-site support on members of the On-site Leadership Team. The Instructional Consultant Team also works with the On-site Leadership Team, but primarily works with instructional staff members in the MSRP schools. Most On-site Leadership Team members agreed that the professional development provided by OPI was of high-quality and on-going and that the OPI Team provided them with support and training to meet their students' literacy needs. Instructional staff members were in less agreement about the extent to which the Instructional Consultant Team provided them the same.

School level buy-in

Buy-in to the MSRP appears high and MSRP schools currently have a strong base from which to implement the project. The vast majority of school staff members agreed that MSRP is an effective process for providing literacy instruction and intervention to all students. In addition, they are confident in the leadership of their district and schools that supports them in this endeavor, and they are optimistic about the future prospects for their students and are committed to seeing them succeed. Schools also have evidence-based literacy programs; systems for administering, collecting, and storing student assessment data; staff members with a willingness to engage in collaborative decision-making; and efforts underway to include family and community members. However, challenges exist.

Instruction and interventions

Across all school levels and subjects taught, the majority of instructional staff members indicated they used evidence-based literacy programs and/or practices and felt supported in instructional decision making. However, while staff members had appropriate literacy programs to use, they did not necessarily think they had the time to use them. At least one-half of teachers, overall, agreed that had just enough time to devote to reading, but more than one-half indicated they had too little time to devote to writing. Furthermore, teachers were more likely to report they had too little time to provide content area instruction and supplemental interventions in reading and writing compared to the time they had to

provide core instruction in reading and writing. Instructional staff members also questioned whether they had the resources needed to successfully implement their literacy programs.

Data systems and use

To their credit, schools had systems for administering, collecting, and storing student assessment data. However, schools did not always disseminate data in a timely or user-friendly manner. Across school levels, larger proportions of staff members reported data dissemination was timelier than it was user-friendly. Furthermore school staff members reported they were not always provided support for data use, especially those in middle/high schools.

The limited user-friendliness of data and support may explain why teachers did not always use data. Between one-quarter and one-third of teachers reported never using screening, progress monitoring, diagnostic, or outcome assessments; 15 percent of these reported using none of the data types (most were middle/high school teachers). Teachers in pre-kindergarten and elementary schools reported using data at least every other week, while middle/high school teachers used data at least every other month. Regarding team-based data use, teachers who belonged to grade-level teams did not always discuss data when they met. Teachers reported higher frequencies of meeting than of using data during meetings.

Collaboration

The vast majority of school staff members agreed that using a team approach to make data-based decisions for students would increase student achievement. However, getting that collaboration may prove difficult. About four-fifths of staff members reported that their school was committed to providing collaboration time to support the MSRP and that their school had a collaborative culture. In addition, the same proportion of teachers reported the use of grade-level teacher teams. However, one-fifth of staff members perceived obstacles to collaboration, and two-fifths of instructional staff members reported “too little” collaboration with colleagues to improve literacy achievement and instruction.

Family and community involvement

MSRP supports family involvement in their child’s education. And in fact, at the pre-kindergarten level, families were involved in schools in a variety of ways. School staff members recognized and honored volunteers, invited families to participate in family literacy activities, communicated with families in meaningful ways, and supported families as their child transitioned into elementary school. Smaller proportions of staff members in elementary and middle/high schools agreed that these type of family involvement activities occurred in their schools. Finally, while schools worked with community partners to support literacy involvement, they had more limited experience establishing private/public partnerships to support middle/high school readiness.

Professional development

On-site Leadership Teams coordinated the provision of professional development to address staff members’ identified needs. Almost all staff members participated in some school-based MSRP professional development between February and May 2012. They most commonly received professional development after school and during staff meetings, and professional development tended to include discussions and video reflections and sharing. Regardless of school level, professional development

addressed purposes and uses of different types of assessments (e.g., progress monitoring, screening, and diagnostic), using data to make instructional decisions, and response to intervention (RTI).

School staff member perceptions of outcomes

The overall purposes of the MSRP are to provide school staff members with tools to improve literacy instruction and improve student outcomes. While almost all school staff members agreed their school was committed to providing professional development to support the MSRP, far fewer agreed that through MSRP they participated in on-going professional development that was a valuable use of their time and provided them with additional skills to meet students' literacy needs. Two-thirds of staff members agreed that participation in MSRP improved student performance.

Student assessment outcomes

Evaluators collected and analyzed data from multiple assessments that were administered for the project. These assessments included Istation's Indicators of Performance (ISIP), Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS), AIMSweb, MY Access! writing, Montana Comprehensive Assessment System (MontCAS), and American College Test (ACT). A variety of assessments were administered to include as many grade levels in literacy outcome measures as possible. Not all students participated in all assessments. Findings from analyses of these data include one key measure for each grade level:

Pre-kindergarten: Increased percentages of students scored in the highest performing categories on the ISIP assessment from winter to spring 2012 (53% to 59%).

Elementary school:

- Increased percentages of students scored in the highest performing categories on the ISIP, DIBELS, and AIMSweb (53% to 59%).
- The same proportion of students scored proficient/advanced on the MontCAS reading assessment from spring 2011 to spring 2012 (85%).

Middle/High school:

- Increased percentages of students scored in the highest performing categories on the ISIP, DIBELS, and AIMSweb (45% to 48%).
- Increased proportions of middle and high school students scored proficient/advanced on the MontCAS (81% to 85% and 63% to 72%, respectively).
- Average scores were obtained by grade 8 and 11 students on the MY Access! writing assessment in spring 2012 (3.5 and 3.7, respectively, on a scale of 1 to 6).
- Lower, average composite scores were obtained by grade 11 students in MSRP schools compared to grade 11 students in non-MSRP schools on the ACT in fall/winter 2011 (16.5 and 19.8, respectively, on a scale of 1 to 36).

Achievement Gaps

OPI met its established goals for increasing MontCAS literacy outcomes for disadvantaged populations across grades 5, 8 and 10. Goals were met for American Indian and economically disadvantaged students and students with limited-English proficiency (LEP) and eligible to receive special education services. The one area where goals were not met was that set for LEP students in grades 8 and 10. In addition,

achievement gap analyses found that, generally, gaps were decreasing between students who are not and who are economically disadvantaged, students who are not eligible and who are eligible for special education services, and students who are English proficient and designated LEP. Achievement gaps were generally increasing between white and American Indian students.

Dropout and graduation rates

MSRP seeks to decrease dropout rates and increase graduation rates. Across the state and in two of the five districts with high schools participating in the MSRP, dropout rates decreased. Across the state and in all of the MSRP districts with high schools, graduation rates decreased.

School level differences

Analyses detected many school-level differences. These differences were most notably at the middle/high school level—levels at which OPI has not, until now, implemented literacy initiatives to address. Smaller proportions of middle/high school staff members, compared to pre-kindergarten and elementary school staff members, agreed their Instructional Consultant provided them with support and training to meet their students' literacy needs; their principal conducted a walkthrough of their classroom; they used evidenced-based programs, especially in math and content area instruction; they had the necessary resources to support literacy instruction; they were provided with timely and user-friendly reports of student assessment data; they had support to access, interpret and use data; and they had structures to support collaboration.

Recommendations

1. The OPI Team should continue providing support for the appropriate use of screening, diagnostic, and progress monitoring assessment data.
2. The OPI Team should share research/best practices on maximizing instructional time and designing school schedules to accommodate supplemental instruction and interventions in reading and writing.
3. The OPI Team should share evidence-based guidance on effective teacher collaboration and collaborative structures that include schools and families and schools and community.
4. The OPI and Instructional Consultant Teams might consider providing extra support and technical assistance to staff members in middle/high school buildings.

